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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how faculty at one institution use social inquiry strategies to deal with the complicated issue of student teacher dispositions. It begins by explaining why they chose social inquiry and looking at the use of one social inquiry strategy, role playing, for enhancing appropriate dispositions. The next section presents examples of situational role plays that can make student teachers "squirm" with discomfort (situations that have many solutions, that can have disastrous outcomes if participants are not careful, and that can help participants make connections between theories of classroom management they have read about and discussed in class). The simulations are student-centered approaches to applying theory to practice in the safety of the classroom. The paper concludes that incorporating role play scenarios, predicaments, and "squirms" into teacher education courses engages student teachers in social inquiry, higher order thinking, and self-reflection. Participation in these strategies can contribute to teacher candidates' developing confidence and appropriate dispositions toward the many facets of education. (Contains 10 references.) (SM)

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Using Social Inquiry Strategies to Enhance Teacher Candidate Dispositions

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Using Social Inquiry Strategies to Enhance Teacher Candidate Dispositions

Professional Commitments and Dispositions

Central Missouri State University is a comprehensive, public university committed to service and excellence and dedicated to providing personalized higher education experiences for a diverse body of candidates. Through a foundation in the liberal arts, professional degree programs, and use of current academic technologies, Central prepares candidates to be lifelong learners who are proficient in their fields of study, able to adapt to a changing world and contribute to the betterment of society. In Central's *Vision for Excellence* (2001), teacher education is identified as one of the University's four cornerstones.

Central's Conceptual Framework reflects the challenges of a dynamic profession whose overarching goal of continuous improvement is attained, in part, by a process involving constant redefinition. The requisites of the various degree programs mirror the belief that "what teachers know and can do . . . makes the crucial differences in what children learn" (*National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*, 1996, p. 7).

We, in the college classroom, attempt to model a passion for and dedication to education that exemplifies expectations for our candidates. There is confidence that candidates will leave Central with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to succeed in their work with P-9 students. There is also an understanding that becoming a professional is developmental and ongoing. Few neophytes are master classroom teachers. Mastery comes with time and experience, is incremental, fluid, and responsive to changing needs.

The most important objective for today's candidates is to improve P-9 student learning. Graduates are problem solvers who can critically examine information and reach sound decisions. There is an expectation that candidates are caring, competent, and committed.

This paper shares how faculty at our institution are using innovative strategies to deal with the complicated issue of dispositions in teacher education. This presentation will demonstrate how the use of social inquiry strategies can meet this challenge and help prepare educators for the 21st century.

Social Inquiry and the Use of Role-Playing

The following section will present why we chose social inquiry and describe some examples of the use of social inquiry strategies, specifically role-playing, for enhancing dispositions appropriate to pre-service teacher education candidates. There are several advantages for using this method. Research indicates that information garnered during social inquiry experiences is retained at a higher rate than the same information given in a singular intake method such as reading or attending a lecture (DeNeve and Heppner, 1997).

Role-plays can simulate the reality of the public school setting while maintaining a safe environment for the participants. The candidates can experience, in a non-threatening way, what they really believe about being a teacher, rather that just mouthing the words they think faculty want to hear. This technique can help candidates explore the many layers of a situation and then discuss their actions, assumptions and belief systems. This technique can help reduce the fear of dealing with these issues for the first time when there are real consequences rather that exploring them in a safe environment (Mitchell, 2000). In Plummer's research of the use of the "School Game" (1974), he developed a role play based on three attitudinal change processes of compliance, identification, and internalization. His results showed that students' attitudes could be changed to form positive feelings and positive affirmations about topics presented in an active learning model. The results also showed that students' felt positive about their long term abilities after such experiences. Students felt that they internalized their attitude changes achieved through the role playing.

Kleine, Kleine and Laveric (2001) stated "As role-identities develop, people form internalized representations of self-in-role. These identity-schemas include actual, stereotypical, and ideal pictures of the role and how it relates to the individual. Schemas may form during the pre-socialization and discovery stages of identity development, become refined during maintenance, only to become unsettled upon disposition . ...The effects of past, role-identity related behavior leads to current self-perceptions and self-definitions" (p. 44-45).

The use of social inquiry and role playing in the teacher education curriculum allows for candidates to articulate and defend their value assumptions about teaching and to test these assumptions in the safety of the classroom, among friends and peers. Frequently they try on roles other than those they personally believe. Some, in self-defense, claim they were acting on beliefs other than their own when a simulation goes awry. They discover that their actions speak louder than their words in many instances. Frequently, candidates are shocked at what they say or do in the role-plays. They say and do things that they would never admit to believing are appropriate. The role-play situation lets them explore these new feeling and actions in a safe environment and helps them be ready for similar stimuli in the real world. In addition, the role-play experience encourages high-level thinking and discussion. It also allows for the opportunity to "try out" a variety of approaches, words, and actions to see if they all come to the same conclusions.

Our candidates gain experience and confidence through the activities. They have spent years in the teacher education program thinking about, dreaming about, what they would say and do, but never actually hearing or seeing themselves do them. The role-plays allow them to test their "teacher voices" and walk the walk of their future. Most candidates, in our experience, come away from the social inquiry days with a broader awareness of what it means to be a teacher. They have extended their concepts of teaching beyond transmitting information to

becoming aware of the extensive responsibilities a teacher must face on a regular basis. This is the basis of the dispositions we want to foster.

Examples of Squirms (Situational Role Plays that make the candidates "squirm")

Our candidates take several courses as part of the major that incorporate student-centered strategies for learning. The strategies are purposely infused into the curriculum to provide constructivist based learning experiences for them and require the candidates to accomplish some task. In addition to completing the requirements of the tasks, they are encouraged to reflect upon their own learning. This self-reflection contributes to increased knowledge and understanding of constructivist, student-centered learning.

One course emphasizing constructivist theory through role playing is taken by early childhood education majors and elementary/early childhood double-majors. This course is early in their degree program. "Early Childhood Principles" is a beginning course that introduces students to the sociological and philosophical foundations of early childhood education. College students participate in hands-on, minds-on activities, such as the role-playing scenarios. Common situations that might come up in a classroom are chosen by the instructor or written by students, discussed in small groups and acted out. The first scenario the class addresses is based on how to conduct a parent interview: strategies to engage in before, during and after the conference. The students read and the class discusses a chapter in the text that presents parents' needs, communication, conferencing, and tense moments with parents (those unexpected conferences). After class discussion and reflection, partners write a conference or tense moment situation. Watching a video depicting a teacher's positive and negative interactions with parents in a conference situation and a tense moment scenario is the next step. Based on class discussion and the video, the students solve and act-out in small groups a peer written scenario.

Developmentally appropriate guidance and inclusion are also topics discussed in the Principles class. After the usual reading and discussion, the students role-play for the entire class a discipline situation and adapt a lesson for a child with special needs. Scenarios might include a child who is treating a classmate unfairly, biting, hitting, taking toys away, stealing, visually challenged, hearing impaired, ADD, etc.

In addition to role-playing situations, the students also respond to scenarios electronically through Blackboard Discussion Board. Depending on the situation the instructor may post a scenario and everyone responds. Or, the students may post a situation on a specific topic, i.e. transitions, routines, emotional crisis, and their peers describe the way that they would handle the scenario. A portion of the quizzes for the Principles course are descriptions of a situation that the student responds to using all the information they have gained from the class to that point. The following is an example of one scenario given to the students on a recent quiz.

Instructions: Respond to the following scenario based on your knowledge of the first 6 chapters in our text. Pay particular attention to the steps for parent conferences, emotional situations, and routines and transitions.

Predicament: You are the director of a children's center, and you have just admitted Jason, who uses a wheelchair, to the 4-year-old class. In order to include him in all the activities you know some physical changes will need to be made in the school. To your delight the child's father is good at building things and has said he would be happy to help any way he can. You have called a conference with Jason's parents and teachers to talk over what adjustments should be made. In order to get things started, you have thought of several possibilities yourself. Suggest what these possibilities might include.

At the end of their degree program is a course that ties all the methodology courses together and gets them ready for student teaching. This course, Classroom Management and

Interactions, is the capstone course. In this course the students are placed in a Professional Development School and have an on campus class in order for them to connect theory and practice together. In this class the candidates do Squirms. The situations are intended to make them squirm. They are situations that have many solutions, some with disastrous outcomes if the candidates are not careful. One semester a young man and a young woman were role playing a situation where they both need a piece of equipment at the same time. The young man's task was to get the equipment and the young woman's was to keep it. By the end of the squirm, the young man was so frustrated and angry that he raised his hand to hit the young woman. She looked him straight in the eye and said "Go ahead, hit me!" He immediately dropped his arm, turned red and profusely apologized. The class was aghast. The role playing students took a few moments to calm down. The young man said that he had "NEVER" hit a woman, or even thought about it, before in his life. He was shocked and stunned that a behavior response such as that was able to come out of him. As a class we discussed and defused and learned. (As a side note, later, in his student teaching, a similar experience happened to him. He told me that he remembered the feelings that lead to his arm-raising, and he stopped the situation. He thanked me for having him realize his potential for frustration and he learned how to find constructive responses.)

Squirms also serve to stimulate candidates to make connections between theories of classroom management they have read about and discussed in class and "real-life" situations. In one such example, teacher candidates read a chapter on planning for motivation from the course text, *Classroom Management and Discipline: Methods to Facilitate Cooperation and Instruction* (Burden, 1999). After a class session focusing on the connections between motivation to learn and classroom behavior, candidates participated in a squirm related to these theories placing an emphasis on collegial relationships.

The class was grouped into fours for the squirm, two candidates acting out the scenario and two observing. The situation involved one candidate posing as a fourth grade teacher angry with another candidate posing as a third grade teacher because the students in fourth grade would not stay seated after completing practice worksheets assigned throughout the day. The fourth grade teacher was appalled that the students would get out of their seats wandering the room digging in materials and books and disrupt other students by talking with them about their work. The fourth grade teacher indicated that she was having behavior problems in her classroom and had come to blame the third grade teacher for the lack of control the children had experienced in their third grade classroom. The two teachers were on opposite ends of the spectrum regarding the operation of their classrooms. The third grade teacher had structured the classroom environment around four dimensions of motivation (Burden, 1999) to: 1) stimulate the students' curiosity and interest, 2) be relevant to the students' lives, 3) allow for student success, and 4) encourage student satisfaction of learning through intrinsic motivation and responses to extrinsic rewards. The fourth grade teacher had structured the classroom environment around punishment and authoritarian control.

The situation challenged the teacher candidates to justify their simulated practices for motivating children to learn and how those practices effect classroom behavior based on the theories investigated in class. The squirm scenario also provoked strong emotional interactions between the two characters in many of the groups. This experience enlightened the candidates to the delicate nature of professional interactions and helped them reflect on and practice strategies for dealing with confrontation.

The candidates in this class work on squirms relating to drugs, puppy love, parents, paraprofessionals, cheating, fund raising and collegial relationships. With professor side

coaching, the players are encouraged to do the "not-so-obvious". Often they are given secret instructions to change the squirm in mid-stream, just like real life is not predicable. Students often come back to campus during and after student teaching and share that the squirms done in class really happened to them. They sound so amazed that the squirms really are true to life. They are grateful for the preparatory experience and the ability to use their newly found "teacherness" instead of just responding from a "studentness" set of theories.

Conclusion

Incorporating role-play scenarios, predicaments, and squirms into teacher education courses engages candidates in social inquiry, higher order thinking, and self-reflection. The simulations are student-centered approaches to applying theory to practice in the safety of a learning setting. Participation in the strategies discussed in this paper contributes to teacher candidates' developing confidence and appropriate dispositions toward the many facets of education. Through reflection on, observation of, participation in, and collaboration about ideas surrounding a common situation the teacher candidates begin to "act" like the teacher they will become.

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